

Amendments to the Specification

Please add the following new paragraph on page 2 commencing after title "SEASONING SYSTEM AND METHOD":

Related Case

The present application is a continuation of U.S. Serial No. 09/641,190 filed on August 17, 2000, now U.S. Patent No. 6,588,363.

(N) Please delete page 10 commencing at line 3 as follows:

Figure 17 is a side view, partially in cross-section, of another embodiment of a seasoning system according to the present invention.

Figure 18 is a top view of a portion of the seasoning system shown in Figure 17.

Figure 19 is a side view, partially in cross-section, of yet another embodiment of a seasoning system according to the present invention.

Please amend page 31, line 4 through page 33, line 9 as follows:

Referring now to FIG. 17, another Another seasoning system ~~310~~ according to the present invention includes a first linear motion conveyor ~~312~~, a seasoning module ~~314~~, and preferably another second linear motion conveyor ~~332~~ and optionally ~~still another~~ third linear motion conveyor ~~334~~. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that each of the first and third conveyors ~~312~~ and ~~334~~ may alternatively be a belt conveyor or a vibratory conveyor. The second conveyor ~~332~~ alternately alternatively could be a vibratory conveyor. As shown in FIG. 17, sensor Sensor 26 as previously described may be used to measure the depth of the product in the tray and thus volume of product moving into the seasoning module ~~314~~. The entire operation may be regulated by an operator control panel 150. If desired, one or more other product volume sensors can be provided in a system for measuring the flowing product at any desired place leading up to, within, or downstream of the seasoning module.

As shown in the FIG. 17, the The food product ~~is~~ may be discharged from the first conveyor ~~312~~ and into a guide shoot ~~316~~ for moving through the seasoning module ~~314~~. The

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seasoning may be supplied by a seasoning supply unit 318, with seasoning being fed by a flow line 320 to a first seasoning tray unit 324, and by a another flow line 322 to a similar second seasoning tray 326. Preferably the first and second seasoning trays 324 and 326 thus move with the tray 332 of the second conveyor. Each seasoning tray may be constructed according to any of the previously described embodiments. The discharge from each seasoning tray preferably is pushed under a relatively low pressure of less than 10 psi by anfirst and second elongate air knife 328, 330knives. The First and second air supplied tubes 328 and 330 thus gently blow the seasoning onto the chips as they pass through the seasoning unit. The seasoned food product may thanthen be conveyed by one or more conveyors to downstream equipment, such as bagging equipment 338.

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Referring to FIG. 18, the The first and second flow lines 320 and 322 from the seasoning unit 318 are better shown supplying to supply the first and second seasoning trays 324 and 326. The guide shoot 316 is depicted, and the A mechanical interconnection of each seasoning tray 324, 326 with the second conveyor 332 can be better understood is made.

The seasoning system as shown in FIGS. 17 and 18discussed above thus allows the seasoning product to "free fall" by gravity through the seasoning unit 314, with the seasoning ideally uniformly coating both sides of each chip. FIG. 17 also discloses a A suitable air recirculation system 370, including a fan, blower or compressor 372 which, outputs air along a flow line 374 to the lines 328, 330first and second air knives. Air is thus withdrawn from the seasoning unit 314 through a suction line 376, and is then filtered by filter unit 378. Filtered seasoning may be output from the seasoning unit 378 by a supply line 380. The This embodiment as shown in FIGS. 17 and 18 thus offers the possibility of uniformly coating chips and other food products with a seasoning, with the seasoning system being relatively simple and having a high throughput rate. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that some food products may have sufficient oil; or otherwise be naturally attracted to seasoning, such that the food product may be directly fed into the seasoning system of the present invention. For other food products, a conventional spray unit may be provided upstream from the seasoning unit for lightly

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coating the food product with an oil spray to better attract the seasoning to the food product. In a suitable application, the first and second air knives 228, 230 knives may be positioned approximately 2.8 inches from the top of the enclosure 314. Accordingly, those skilled will appreciate that the seasoning units 314 may be relatively compact, simple, and highly reliable. -

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cont'd*

FIG. 19 discloses yet Yet another embodiment of a seasoning system 360 according to the present invention. Sensors 26 includes a sensor and linear motion conveyors 312, 332 and 334 may be similar to the system shown in FIG. 17 as discussed above, with the output from the seasoning system similarly going to the downstream equipment, such as baggers. 338. In FIG. 19, An enclosure 340 is may be provided with a modified guide shoot 342, which includes an internal plate 344 which initially guides the chips, so that the chips slide down a ramp surface 346 as a layer. Another A second guide sheet, such as a second sheet 348 with a second ramp surface 350, is providing for allowing the chips to fall off the first ramp surface 346 and expose the other side of each chip as it slides down the second ramp surface 350. While sliding down from the first ramp surface 346, one side of each chip may be seasoned from a first seasoning tray 352, and while sliding down the second ramp surface 350, the other side of each chip may be seasoned from the second seasoning tray 354. Seasoning is supplied to the trays 352 and 354 by flow lines 320 and 322 as previously discussed. The advantage of the this system as shown in FIG. 19 is that the food product is more gently handled compared to the embodiment shown in FIG. 17. discussed above. A disadvantage of the FIG. 19 this embodiment, however, is that the same size seasoning unit has a much lower throughput rate. If desired, air knives 228 and 230 as shown in FIG. 17 optionally may be used in the FIG. 19 this embodiment.